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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 THE HAGUE 002705

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2025

TAGS: PREL PTER PGOV SOCI ASEC KISL NL

SUBJECT: ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

REF: A. SECSTATE 173666

1B. THE HAGUE 2599

1C. THE HAGUE 2651

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES CHAT BLAKEMAN FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

11. (S) This cable responds to ref a request for information on Islamic Extremism in the Netherlands.

12. (S) SUMMARY: Within the relatively large Dutch Muslim Community, Islamic Extremism represents a worrisome and growing trend. Dutch security and intelligence services estimate that about 5 percent of the total Dutch Muslim population, or roughly 50,000 individuals, follow "non-moderate" forms of Islam and may be sympathetic to fundamentalist or radical views. Within this group, the GONL believes there are 150-200 hard-core radicals who might be prepared to use violence; approximately 20 individuals have been arrested or will stand trial for terrorist offenses. The Netherlands has both home-grown radical Islamists -- most notably the Hofstad group, which has been associated with the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh -- and transnational terrorist groups that maintain a presence in Holland or transit through the country, as well as a few volunteers who have gone to Iraq to fight against coalition forces. END SUMMARY.

EXTREMISM RISING

13. (C) According to public sources, the Dutch General Security and Intelligence Service (AIVD) believes that the vast majority of Dutch Muslims -- 95 percent -- follow "moderate" forms of Islam that do not call for radical social or political change. Within the remaining 5 percent -- or approximately 50,000 individuals -- the number of "radicals" potentially prepared to use violence to pursue religious and political objectives is estimated to be about 150-200. This hard-core of activists is presumed to be supported by small but tight social groups within the larger Muslim population.

14. (C) During 2004, Dutch security services reported that Muslims, particularly those of Moroccan origin, between 15 and 25 years-old had become increasingly receptive to radical interpretations of Islam. Religiously-conservative dress and viewpoints, and public expressions of frustration and rage regarding external events such as the war in Iraq and developments in the Middle East have become increasingly common on university campuses. Internet websites catering to Muslim youth have also witnessed dramatic increases in pro-al-Qaida and anti-U.S./anti-Israel sentiments, especially since the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by an Islamic extremist in November 2004 (see below). Community police similarly report a noticeable rise in pro-al-Qaida graffiti in predominantly Muslim neighborhoods of large cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague.

RADICAL MESSAGE/FOREIGN INFLUENCE

15. (S) The GONL has publicly stated that Saudi government money and missionary groups have played a role in bringing a radical message to Holland. It is widely reported that the Dutch security services are monitoring six Salafi mosques and foundations for their extremist bent and possible role in radicalization and recruitment. They include al-Fourqaan mosque in Eindhoven, al-Tawheed mosque in Amsterdam, as-Sunnah mosque in The Hague, al-Mouahidine in Helmond, Foundation for Islamic Youth in Breda, and the Islamic Foundation for Instruction and Transfer of Knowledge in Tilburg. The GONL claims these mosques are supported by missionary activity and, until relatively recently, funding from Saudi Arabia. Imams who admonish the moral decadence of Dutch society and proclaim all attempts at integration undesirable have preached at these mosques for years. Some of these imams also preach the need for Muslims to defend themselves in the face of anti-Muslim sentiments. Al-Tawheed was linked to the Saudi al Haramain organization, designated under Executive Order 13224 in 2004. Three of the Salafi mosques including al-Fourqaan, al-Mouahidine, and Foundation for Islamic Youth have been linked to the Saudi mission Al Waqf al Islami.

16. (SBU) Nearly all Dutch Imams are born and receive their training overseas, primarily in Turkey, Morocco and the Gulf

States. The GONL recently declared two imams in Eindhoven and one in Rotterdam personae non grata for allegedly attempting to recruit for extremist groups. One has already left the country; the other two are appealing their expulsions in court. The controversial Minister for Integration, Rita Verdonk, has recently called for barring foreign imams from preaching in the Netherlands, but her proposal has met strong resistance on religious and free speech grounds. Other proposals to increase opportunities for training Imams in the Netherlands have broader public support, but are proving difficult to implement in practice.

RECRUITMENT

¶7. (SBU) Recruitment of individuals to extremist ideas in the Netherlands is growing, especially among alienated Muslim youth. According to the GONL, recruitment here follows three well-established patterns. Most commonly, a foreign veteran of jihad, well-versed in Islam, recruits young men and, to a lesser extent, young women from the fringes of mosques, schools or Islamic cultural centers. Groups seeking a spiritual leader or connections to the international extremist network represent a second more autonomous and self-selecting recruitment, which tends to take place on Internet websites or in chat rooms. The third form of recruitment occurs in prison, where individuals jailed for extremist or terrorist activity recruit followers from a plethora of discontented prison inmates.

¶8. (SBU) The GONL produced a report in December 2004, "From Dawa to Jihad" that reported an increase in recruitment for both jihad and dawa in the Netherlands. Dawa, as the Dutch define it, is the intensive propagation of radical Islamic ideology through missionary work. The Dutch have been monitoring Dawa-oriented radical Salafist organizations and networks from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States who are all working to "re-Islamize" Muslim minorities in the west.

TERRORIST OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS SUPPORT

¶9. (S) There is solid evidence that both home grown and transnational terrorist groups have planned to carry out attacks in Holland in the past year. At the moment, 20 individuals are being held in Dutch prisons on terrorism-related charges, including planning to carry out attacks. So far, Dutch security forces have disrupted attack plans in the preliminary stages, but there is a body of reporting indicating that additional plans may be in the works. On September 9, the Dutch government raised its terrorist threat level claiming it had "sufficient cause for taking additional security measures at railway and metro stations in Amsterdam and Rotterdam."

¶10. (S) In addition to planning attacks against targets in the Netherlands, transnational groups have also used the Netherlands as a source of logistic support for international terrorist networks. The Dutch security services are aware that jihad veterans (including those who have fought in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, Bosnia, and Iraq), terrorist facilitators, and recruits have all transited the Netherlands in the past few years, and are watching such movements closely.

GROUPS OPERATING IN THE NETHERLANDS

¶11. (S) Transnational Islamic Extremist organizations on Dutch soil include the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and Hizb ut Tahrir (HUT). Several al-Qaida-linked individuals are also known to have transited and/or made contact with individuals in the Netherlands. The most prominent extremist group, however, is the home-grown "Hofstad Group" -- at the moment, 14 of the approximately 20 individuals in detention or awaiting trial for terrorist-related charges in the Netherlands are associated with this group.

HOFSTAD GROUP

¶12. (S) The so-called "Hofstad Group" -- named after the neighborhood in The Hague where several members lived -- is an indigenous Islamist terrorist cell of approximately 20 young Dutch Muslims of mainly North African descent. The group adheres to the radical "Takfir wal Hijra" version of Salafi Islam, also shared by Al Qaida second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri, under which the killing of perceived enemies of Islam is considered justified. The Hofstad group first attracted the attention of Dutch authorities in 2002 when one member (Samir Azzouz) attempted to travel to Chechnya for jihad. Several members, including Azzouz, were arrested in the summer of 2004 in conjunction with apparent plans to launch terrorist attacks against Schipol Airport, a nuclear

reactor, and other targets, but were later released for lack of evidence.

¶13. (S) In November 2004, the group attracted international attention when a member, Mohammed Bouyeri, murdered Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh on an Amsterdam sidewalk in broad daylight. After shooting van Gogh and slashing his throat, Bouyeri pinned a note to his victim's chest espousing radical Islamist views and threatening several other prominent Dutch figures. When police attempted to search a house in The Hague occupied by members of the Hofstad Group shortly after the murder, the suspects threw several hand grenades, shot at police, and seriously injured one officer before being overwhelmed. The revelation in the Dutch press that Dutch authorities had had Bouyeri and other Hofstad Group members under surveillance for several months but were apparently unaware of the group's plans or capabilities led to wide-spread calls for a reevaluation of the terrorist threat in the Netherlands and the GONL's plans for dealing with it.

¶14. (C) In July 2005, Mohammed Bouyeri was sentenced to life in prison for murdering Van Gogh. Bouyeri, along with 13 others, will stand trial in December, 2005 for membership in a terrorist organization that plotted to kill Dutch politicians. (Note: Participation in a terrorist organization only became illegal with the passage of a new raft of counterterrorism laws in August 2004.) Some of the 13 standing trial for membership, will also face additional charges. Nouredine el Fatimi, arrested in June, also faces charges for illegal arms possession. He eluded capture for nearly eight months and, according to press accounts, was recruiting young men off the streets in The Hague to join a terrorist group. Hofstad members Jason Walters and Ismail Akhnikh will also be charged with illegal arms possession and attempted murder as the result of their grenade and shooting attack against police during their arrest. On September 22, two of the marginal members arrested in November 2004 were released from custody, but are still expected to stand trial.

DUTCH FIGHTERS TO IRAQ

¶15. (SBU) As in the rest of Europe, the GONL is concerned about the possible return of a handful of its citizens or other EU nationals who have traveled to Iraq to carry out jihad against U.S. and coalition forces. The most high-profile case of a Dutch citizen active in Iraq is Wesam al Delaema, a former hairdresser in Amsterdam, whose extradition is sought by the U.S. He has been charged with conspiring to murder Americans in Iraq by placing explosives in a road in Iraq. Delaema and others called themselves the "Mujahideen from Fallujah" and videotaped their intentions to kill Americans in Iraq using explosives. The extradition request is currently working its way through the Dutch legal system.

COMMENT

¶16. (S) Although only a very small minority of Dutch Muslims can be considered dangerous radicals, virulent strains of Islamic extremism are becoming disturbingly popular. The extremist message is particularly attractive -- almost trendy -- among Moroccan youth in segregated, relatively poor neighborhoods in Dutch cities. Awareness of radical Islam in the Netherlands is not a post-9/11 or post-Madrid phenomenon, as the AIVD has reported on radical Islam for years. The evolution of the Hofstad group focused the GONL on fact that radicalization among home-grown Muslims was occurring, but it is only since the murder of van Gogh, that the Dutch government has started to take serious steps to stem the tide of radicalization.
BLAKEMAN